

THE PLAGUE OF THE HEART

NO. 1489

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, AUGUST 10, 1879,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*(When the regular congregation unanimously left their seats to be occupied by strangers,
who crowded the building to its utmost capacity)*

*“What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all your people Israel,
which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread
forth his hands toward this house: then hear you in heaven
your dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to
every man according to his ways, whose heart you know;
(for you, even you only, know the hearts of all the children of men;)
that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land which you gave unto our fathers.”
1 Kings 8:38-40.*

You all know that the temple at Jerusalem was the one place of sacrifice throughout all the holy land, for thus had the Lord spoken, “Whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers which sojourn among you, that offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and brings it not unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, to offer it unto the Lord: even that man shall be cut off from among his people.” According to God’s law there was one altar and it was counted a high crime when the tribes which dwelt beyond Jordan built another, and their brethren sought them, saying, “Rebel not against the LORD in building an altar besides the altar of the LORD our God” (Jos 22:19). As there was only one high priest, so there was only one altar—and sacrifice might not be offered anywhere else but on that altar at Jerusalem.

Hence, when a man wished to present his offerings to God, he went up to the temple which Solomon dedicated by the prayer in which our text occurs. The people did afterwards build altars on high hills and in green groves, but these places, and the sacrifices offered there, were contrary to the mind of God. There was but one altar and one sacrifice, and that was at the temple. Hence when the godly Israelite prayed, he looked towards the one place of sacrifice, not in superstition, but in believing remembrance of the one sacrifice, and the one altar, and the one glorious token of the divine presence which shone over the mercy seat within the veil. He knew that God could only accept him through the one sacrifice and therefore he looked that way.

The people especially looked toward the temple in prayer in times of national calamity. In drought, or when the crops were consumed by locusts or by caterpillars, or when blast and mildew destroyed the hope of harvest, or in time of war or pestilence, their supplications were presented unto the one JEHOVAH—all eyes looking towards His one sacred shrine where the one sacrifice smoked upon the altar. But although there were those special opportunities and God heard His people’s cry, as a nation, it is very pleasant to observe that He regarded the griefs of individuals. Every man, says the text, that knew the plague of his own heart was to spread forth his hands towards that one place of sacrifice and pray, and God would forgive him and deliver him.

That is my subject tonight. The Lord will hear whatsoever prayer and supplication is made by any man in reference to his own personal affliction, if his heart is turned towards God’s own temple.

But what is that temple? and where is it? There are now no material temples beneath the whole heaven, unless the bodies of believers may be so called, and no one thinks of looking to them. No, “The Most High dwells not in temples made with hands.” No one place is more sacred than another.

*“Where’er we seek Him, He is found,
And every place is hallowed ground.”*

There remains one temple, however, and that is the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is temple, altar, and sacrifice. And if you would look the right way in prayer, and if you desire your prayers to speed, you must look to Him by the eye of faith.

See, there He sits at the right hand of God. Having finished the one sacrifice and made atonement for sin forever, there He sits—Priest, altar, offering, temple—and every true supplicant must enter into the holiest by His blood, “by a new and living way, which he has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.” Whoever beneath the wide heavens is conscious of the plague of his own heart, or has anything that plagues him or aught that troubles him, he may turn his eyes towards Christ, the true temple, with a certainty that God will hear his prayer and answer his request, and send to him deliverance.

“We have an altar,” and that altar is our Lord’s own blessed person. We have but one and we tremble for those who set up another—and to that one we look with confident hope, being assured that the sacrifice once offered there has made our peace with God and procured acceptance for our supplications.

*“We rear no altar—Thou have died.
We deck no priestly shrine.
What need have we of creature-aid?
The power to save is Thine.”*

But now I must come nearer to the point in hand. The text speaks of “every man which shall know the plague of his own heart.” I am going to talk to you about that knowledge and the plague with which it deals.

These are home affairs that we shall speak of tonight—not matters beyond our line and unpractical, but our own personal concerns, “Every man the plague of his own heart.” A great many men think they know the plague of other people’s hearts and there is a great deal of talk in the world about this family, that person, and the other. I pray you let the scandals of the hour alone and think of your own evils. This night let each man consider his own home affairs and not other people’s business. He would be a bad farmer who plowed other people’s lands and left his own untilled. He would be a poor gardener who used his hoe on other men’s weeds and not on his own.

Tonight I pray you let each man think of home affairs. Yes, and let him think of heart affairs, for whatever may be wrong about us, the worst place to have anything wrong is the heart. Out of it are the issues of life. We can endure the burdens of life, but “a wounded spirit who can bear?” A plague in the body is not half so bad as a plague in the heart—a plague in the soul—of all plagues the plague of the heart is the sorest. It is not the plague of another man’s heart which I have to think of tonight, but the plague of my own heart, for the text speaks of knowing, “Every man the plague of his own heart.”

It is a dreadful mischief that there should be a plague in the heart, for a plague is a dreadful thing. A plague means, first, something which brings *pain*, and there is many a secret heartache in this world where we least suspect it. If you could take the roofs off the houses of London, strange sights would be seen, but if once you could proceed to put a window into every heart, some of those whose faces look gladdest would appear to us to be among the most miserable of men. The plague of the heart means pain, care, worry, grief, and trouble of mind. But it means more than that, for the plague is a *disease*.

Now, a diseased heart is something terrible. Often we see it reported that a man died suddenly of disease of the heart, which I suppose frequently means that the doctors do not know what he died of—

but certainly, anything that ails the heart is a disease in a most important organ. The hand may be cured, or we may even lose it and live—but when the heart is affected, the whole system gets out of gear, and life itself verges dangerously upon the edge of death. As it is with the heart of the body, so is it with the soul's heart—its depravity or in other words, its moral disease—puts all the faculties out of order and ruins our whole nature.

Nothing can be right with the immortal nature till the heart is cured of the plague which came upon it through the fall. The worst point about the plague of the heart is the fact that if it be not removed, it will ultimately *bring death* upon the soul. Plague in the heart is mortal and I would be much surprised if I have not in this great congregation some who have a present pain, a present disease of the heart, and who will—unless God of His grace lead them to adopt the cure we shall set before them tonight, perish through this deadly plague.

O that while I am speaking to you, the Holy Spirit may lead many a sin-sick soul to breathe out some such desire as that expressed by John Newton when he wrote—

*“Physician of my sin-sick soul,
To Thee I bring my case.
My raging malady control,
And heal me by Thy grace.*

*Pity the anguish I endure,
See how I mourn and pine.
For never can I hope a cure
From any hand but Thine.*

*Lord, I am sick, regard my cry,
And set my spirit free.
Say, canst Thou let a sinner die,
Who longs to live to Thee?”*

To come to close quarters. Our first point will be *forms of this plague*. The next will be *mode of treatment*, and the third will be, *help to be expected*.

I. First, let us mention various FORMS OF THIS PLAGUE OF THE HEART.

They are very many, perhaps almost as many as the hearts themselves. Some have this plague of the heart in the form of a terrible *memory*. With blood-red line remorse has scored their memories in an ineffaceable manner. We need not go into particulars—a secret something known scarcely to anyone but themselves hides away in the most tender part of their nature and eats away at their vitals. They sinned—sinned terribly—and the sin haunts them.

They could be happy if they could forget, but that one sin is ever before them as though a blood spot were painted on their very eyeballs. They are reminded of it by the simplest events, for it seems as though God had put an accusing tongue into the stones they tread upon and the walls which surround them. Even their beds refuse them repose. They wake in the darkness and sit in speechless horror. Or if they fall asleep, the visions of the night scare them. Few know of their fault and yet they imagine that they are universally suspected. Nobody has cried shame upon them, but they cry shame upon themselves.

It may not be only one sin, but perhaps all their sins in one pack bay at them and pursue them like bloodhounds eager to devour. They can hear the voice of their sins above all notes of music or shouts of laughter. When they would be quiet and at rest, they cannot be, for they are tossed to and fro like an ocean in a storm. They have the plague of remembered sin upon them and see no remedy for it. Tonight it is my gladsome message that there is a cure for this form of heart-plague—an effectual cure. Transgression can be blotted out, even the greatest trespass can be altogether forgiven. Sin can be put

away so that it shall not be mentioned against you anymore nor ever. Blessed be God for this. If this is the plague of your heart, have confidence and embrace the cure tonight.

With others it takes another shape. Their heart-plague has assumed the form of *dissatisfaction and unrest*. They cannot be quiet. They are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest. They were a little pleased at one time when they had a new scheme on hand to divert their thoughts and amuse their minds. The scheme has prospered, but that prosperity has brought them no contentment—they must now be at something else—and while the new plan is in full swing, they will a little forget, but when that also is accomplished, they will sit down and cry, “What next? I am sick of all things and most of all of myself. Life is worry and disappointment. I cannot be quiet. I crave a something, I know not what.” There are hundreds and thousands of men who have all that heart can wish and yet are miserable. On the other hand, I could point you to many hundreds who have but little in this world and yet are almost as happy as the angels, in full contentment rejoicing in their God.

The plague in the heart rages fiercely in those who lack nothing except the power to enjoy what they have. They have succeeded in their learning and gained their degree, but increased learning has only enlarged the sphere of their disquietude. They have succeeded in business and have retired, but retirement is a weariness to them. They have prospered in everything and this has become their adversity. Like the wise man of old, they cry, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” They mourn over all earthly good, saying, “There is nothing in it. It is an empty thing. Woe is me! Where is rest for my soul?”

Again, it is my glad errand tonight to tell you where perfect rest and sweet contentment can be found—where your soul shall dwell at ease and possess the earth, and inherit worlds to come and your peace shall be like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea. May the Lord God, the Holy Spirit, help you to avail yourselves of the blessed peace stored up in the one great sacrifice which every unresting heart may have, if it will only come to Him.

This plague takes another shape, and I mention several, that I may come home to many hearts and depict many experiences. In many it is *a wretched tendency to some one sin*, which, nevertheless, the man in his better moments does not wish to commit. Some are horribly plagued by their passions. They stand out against them occasionally, and come to a pause and resolve, “It shall not be. In the name of everything that is good, it shall not be.” They hate and despise themselves for it, and yet they yield to overwhelming lust, and are hurried forward by their passions like dried leaves in the tempest, or spray dashed aloft by a storm.

Many individuals are plagued with the temptation to strong drink. They vow that they will abstain, but the serpent stings and they thirst for the firewater, and will have it, though it degrades their manhood below the level of the swine. With others, wantonness and chambering have gained the mastery and the plague is foul indeed. With another class it is ungovernable anger, quickness of wrath, or that slow-burning, smoldering fire called malice, which is nearest akin to the fire of hell. Better burn with a life-long fever than be the prey of these fierce heats. Some know the evil which twines about them like a python, and they wish to resist it, and yet they are so fascinated by the sin that they cannot tear away the serpent’s folds.

Many are as though they were taken in a net, or garmented about with lusts, till they are comparable to Hercules of old when he put on the tunic which burned into his flesh and clung to his body, so that when he labored to tear it off as best he could, he tore away his flesh therewith. Many are enshrouded in a horrible robe of habit which has become a part of their being, the very skin of their souls. They cannot get rid of that awful fire-tunic—a tendency to sin. To them also I have the joy to proclaim, in the name of God, the all-merciful, that from this they can be redeemed. They can be delivered from the bondage of corruption and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

In others, this plague of the heart is a *wretched indecision*—a perpetual vacillation. They are resolved at times, but their resolve ends in nothing. Oh, there are numbers of men who know it themselves—that they can never succeed in life because they are “everything by turns and nothing

long,” and especially in matters of religion they wax and wane like the moon. Today they repent. Tomorrow they return to their sin. Today they are in earnest. Tomorrow they are careless. Today they are almost persuaded to be Christians. Tomorrow they are quite persuaded to find pleasure in sin. False as the waves and fickle as the winds, they are never long enough in one place to take root anywhere. Unstable as water, they shall not excel.

Who can heal them of this moral palsy? Can nothing decide them to choose the right direction? Yes, there is One who can decide them. There is One who can throw the weight of His sweet love into the quivering balance and make it turn in the right direction. O hesitating mortal, if you have grace to look tonight towards the one sacrifice, the Holy Spirit will root you and ground you in love—Jesus will make a steadfast man of you and you shall yet say, “O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.”

I have known this plague of the heart in some to take the form of a *mournful hardness*, so that they cry, “I would, but cannot, repent. I would feel, but I cannot feel. I seem to be given up, seared as with a hot iron and insensible.” This is a fearful plague—perhaps worse than all I have previously mentioned because more fatal. Is there, then, no hope? Yes, there is One who can make the dead to live, who can take away the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh, and it is His name we preach tonight, the name of Jesus, who shall save His people from their sins.

There are others whom I meet pretty constantly who have a *faintness of heart*, a despondency of spirit, and this is their plague. They cannot believe that there is mercy for them. They cannot hope that they could live a new life. At times they feel a desire to turn unto the Lord, but they think it is impossible—and that grim impossibility drives them back from Christ and forward to yet grosser sin. Many a man has said, “Because there is no hope, therefore will I sin to the very length of my tether. I cannot be saved and so I may as well have the pleasures of sin to the full.”

I pray, dear hearer, do not let despair thus saddle you and ride you, for there is no cause for it. There is salvation where Jesus goes and He is here tonight. No man need say he is denied a hope since Christ came into the world to seek and to save that which is lost. Oh, my hearer, hope as long as you live. To the very confines of death’s dominions and to the borders of hell-shade, let this word of mercy fly, “There is hope. There is hope.” For the most hopeless there is still hope. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

One other form of heart-plague is a *constant dread of the future*. Multitudes of persons are always under apprehension and especially under apprehension of death. You must not mention death in some places—the very word is horrible. Some would like, I dare say, that the etiquette of the age should respect their coward fears and be as daintily absurd as that of the French monarch who would not allow death to be mentioned in his presence, and when his secretary read the words, “the death of the king of Spain,” he sharply asked, “What is that? What is that?” in anger, that such a thing should be mentioned in his sacred presence. The secretary was obliged to say that it was a circumstance which occasionally happened to kings in Spain.

Scores of people would like us to be just as delicate as that upon the subject of their end. But O sirs, you must die. The youngest among us who is in best health *will* die—may die soon, but where the snows of winter lie upon your heads, and where already the tenement begins to crumble through old age, death *must* come. Are you not prepared, my friend? Are you not prepared? Then I do not wonder that you tremble at the very thought of being summoned before your Maker. But be not as the ostrich which hides its silly head from the hunter and then dreams of being secure. Learn to look death in the face, for it will soon stare you out of countenance.

Do you call yourself a Christian and are you afraid to die? Oh! if God had made you such a man as you ought to be, you would not dread to die, for death is a mere undressing to the true believer, an undressing which leads to his being arrayed in glory. Death to the saint is the gate of endless joy and shall he dread to enter there? To such as are in Christ who have looked to the one temple, to the one

sacrifice, to the one Priest, to the one altar, the fear of death is gone. Within them God has wrought such a work, and for them Christ has prepared such a heaven, that without apprehension they may look through the gates of pearl, and often clap their hands for very joy, as they sing—

*“See that glory, how resplendent!
Brighter far than fancy paints.
There in majesty transcendent,
Jesus reigns, the King of saints.
Spread my wings, my soul, and fly
Straight to yonder world of joy.”*

So elevated is the joyous experience of the true believer that death to him would be unmingled gain, and he knows it to be so and therefore at times he is even in haste to be gone.

Have I, in any of these descriptions, picked you out, my dear friend, tonight? Have you a heart-plague like any of these? Or is it some other form of the great spiritual pestilence? I cannot tarry to describe it, for now I want to speak upon the mode of treatment. May the Holy Ghost help you to feel the plague and accept the remedy upon the spot.

II. You desire to get rid of this heart-plague—effectually rid of it—let us then consider the **MODE OF TREATMENT** which will work a cure.

I hope you are not so foolish as to say, “I shall not think about the matter, for it would only plague me more.” That is a very bad habit, and only such as a frivolous or a wicked person would follow. A man is in a trade and he says to his clerk, “Don’t bring me the books, I do not want to know anything about my accounts. Don’t let me see my day-book or ledger. I had rather not be troubled with them.” The confidential clerk replies, “Sir, I think you ought to see your account at the bank.” “No,” answers the silly one, “I should not like to be perplexed with figures, and balances, and losses, and deficits. I should not enjoy my dinner if I attended to these matters—let us drive dull care away and enjoy life while we may. Don’t worry me. Keep those wretched books away.”

I do not think it needs a prophet to foretell that this tradesman will soon be in his creditors’ hands, with very small assets. By such avoidance of knowing his position, he will be ruined as sure as doomsday. And whenever a man dares not look into the state of his own *soul* and dreads a half-an-hour alone, he may conclude that there is something rotten in the state of Denmark—something far, far gone with regard to his soul’s estate. He need not question that, I think.

But let us not be so unwise, for the first mode of treatment we prescribe tonight, in order to the remedy, is that every man should know the plague of his own heart, that is to say, he should *endeavor to get a true and accurate knowledge of his spiritual condition as in the sight of God.*

What is this sin that troubles you? Honestly look at it. What is this fear that haunts you? Do you know what it is? I would advise you to write it down and see it in black and white. What is this tendency to sin that enslaves you? What is this wretched indecision? Get a diagnosis of the disease and be sure it is a correct one. Look your own case through and through. It very much helps towards salvation when a man knows something of his need of it, and he will be very much helped to a sense of his need if he will impartially examine his own state. Might I ask such a thing, I fear it would not be granted, but I am sure good would come of it if I could get it—that every person tonight on his going home would sit down in his chamber, look into the state of his heart before God, and then write on a piece of paper one of two words—“saved” or “lost.”

My friend, do not write that word “saved” unless you can honestly and sincerely say, “I have looked to the Savior and He has saved me.” But suppose you are forced, in honesty to your conscience, to write down the word “lost,” as your true description, it will be both manly and useful to do so. I have known this to be done in cases in which, before the morning light, that piece of paper has been burned and another word has been written in its stead, even the bright consoling word “saved.”

Only foolish people object to inquiry as to their state—be not one of them. Write down the condition of your soul. Take stock and make sure. Write down “impenitent,” if you are so. Put it before you in black and white. Write “unbelieving,” if you are so. It cannot hurt you to know the truth, and it may be of lasting benefit to you. We prescribe that to begin with.

Then, next, as Solomon bade those who knew the plague of their own heart turn their eyes to the great sacrifice at the temple, the next thing to do is to *turn your eye to God*. You cannot help yourself and nobody on earth can help you. Your case, apart from divine grace, is desperate. This heart-plague will not die out of its own accord, nor will any change of your outward condition eradicate it. Turn, then, to the great Physician and cry to Him thus, “Lord God, You did make me, You can mend me. You did make me, You can make me over again. I am lost. Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, You can save me.” Look heavenward and Christward—Look to the bleeding Lamb, to the risen Redeemer.

To look within will breed despair, but to look to Christ on the cross, nay, to Christ now at the right hand of God, will beget lively hope. Jesus is “able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them”—to look to Him is the main part of the cure. Bring God into the business. Bring Christ into your trouble, for here lies your help. Look that way, I pray you. Look and live.

And when you have looked that way, the next thing to do is to *spread the trouble before God*. Some do not know how to pray. When you cannot pray begin your attempt in this manner, “Lord, I cannot pray, I cannot pray, oh, teach me to pray.” But you say you do not feel—then I would urge you to confess, “Lord, I do not feel. My heart is hard, Lord, cause me to feel.” Oh, but you say you are so disquieted and so restless. Go and tell Him, “Lord, I am so disquieted. I cannot rest. Help me. Help me.”

Tell it all to Jesus without reserve. I am persuaded that if you will confess the plague to God, you will soon find help from that act of confession. The Lord Jesus will speedily relieve your conscience in a very special and effectual manner. Tell it to no man—tell it to God alone. Judas confessed to the priests and you know what he did next. Confess to God and you shall not go forth to hang yourself, but you will go forth to find that He is able to help you, for, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to save us from all unrighteousness.” Pour out your heart before Him and it will ease you mightily.

After confession is made, with your eye to the sacrifice, *pray with your eye still upon the Lord Jesus*. Pleading the blood of Jesus, be importunate for pardon. No man has truly sought God in prayer, looking to Jesus Christ, and been refused, and there never shall be such a man. I remember how I was struck with what my mother said to me when she was pleading with me to lay hold on Christ and I was despairing. She said, “There was never yet a man so wicked as to say that he had sincerely sought the Lord and asked mercy at His hands through Christ, and yet had been denied.”

Now, I thought that I had done so and I felt sure that the Lord had refused me, and I half resolved in my mind that I would say as much. But I have never said it, for this reason, that I sought Him again and found Him, to the joy of my spirit. So shall it be with you, poor, weary seeker. You shall find Him soon if you seek Him with your whole heart.

Eternity shall not reveal a single instance in which Christ Jesus cast away a sinner that came to Him. All hell shall be searched through and they shall ask them, “Is there one here that can say that Christ rejected him when he came to Him?” And though glad enough to blaspheme, there shall not be found among the damned a single tongue that shall dare to utter such a baseless slander against the Friend of sinners.

My hearers, if you repentantly believe and yet are rejected, you will be the first. Come, then, ay, come tonight and tell out the plague of your heart with your eye to Christ, and then plead with God, “Lord, save me.” I would put words into your mouth if I could. Say, “Lord, save me. I am lost, save me. There is a plague in my heart, heal it. I confess my great sin, Lord, blot it out. I acknowledge my present depravity and tendency to sin, Lord, tear up my sin by the roots. You know my disquietude and my hardness of heart, Lord, give me peace. There is something in me, I scarce know what it is, that I must

get rid of—Lord, rid me of it, for Jesus' sake. Oh, for Your Son's sake, for His blood's sake, for His death's sake, for His resurrection's sake, I beseech You, hear me."

Earnest, childlike pleading shall certainly have its answer. Only do you believe that the Lord can do this and He will do it. Faith is the starting point of salvation, yea, it brings you to salvation itself. Jesus Christ said, "Believe you that I am able to do this?" And the poor man answered, "Lord, I believe." Follow his example. My Lord Jesus Christ is God as well as Man. He is the Son of the Highest and He came into this world and took the form of man, and in that form He suffered, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. Why, then, should we doubt Him? The merit of His precious blood is exceeding great beyond compare, and He would have us believe in its eternal efficacy—why should we not?

Do you say you cannot believe? Read over the story of the four evangelists and then sit still awhile, and think it all over. He who suffered so is God. The incarnate God died this shameful death to save the guilty. Surely as you look, you will believe. The Holy Spirit will create faith in you by His own inspired testimony. You will say, "I know not how it is, but faith comes stealing over me. I do believe the dying Savior's love and I cast my soul upon Him." That is the way of salvation—just to rest in Christ. As the pitcher hangs on the nail, so must we hang on Christ. As the baby lies in its mother's arms without fear, so must we lie in the arms of Jesus. We must be nothing and Christ everything. When we do this we shall get rest—rest from all the plague of the heart.

III. I close, lest I weary you, by mentioning, in the third place, HELPS WHICH WE MAY EXPECT TO RECEIVE if we follow the treatment which I have tried to describe.

The first help we shall get according to our text is, "Then hear you in heaven, your dwelling place, *and forgive.*" In answer to your confession and your prayer and your looking to the great altar and sacrifice, there shall come a free pardon from the court of heaven. What a splendid word that is "forgive," when you know God's sense of it. It is to cast into the depths of the sea all memory of sin, to blot it out as a paid debt, to drive it away as a cloud, to cover it so that it is out of sight forever, to cast it behind His back, yea, even to cause it to cease to be as though it had never been.

I know one who differed from his friend and spoke, under a misunderstanding, more sharply than the case required. His friend was quite able to fight his own battles and say sharp things too. The case was cleared up and misapprehension removed, and he who had been first offended said in all heartiness, "Let us take the sponge and clean the slate and begin anew, as if the past had never been." The other was a good man and true, but he paused so much in his reply that the first brother does not feel that he had healed the wound and felt tempted to say, "Say straight out that you do not mean to forgive and then I shall know where you are."

A limping reconciliation is half a feud. But when God forgives He means it, and the offense is gone forever. He cleans off the record. It is all gone, every trace of it. I think I see that slate with your sins written on it tonight—a long and heavy score—but if you go to the Lord as I have described, He will wipe it all out. As far as the east is from the west He will remove your transgressions from you.

Do you remember the story of Martin Luther when Satan came to him, as he thought, with a long black roll of his sins, which truly might make a swaddling-band for the round world? To the arch-enemy Luther said, "Yes, I must own to them all. Have you any more?" So the foul fiend went his way and brought another longer roll, and Martin Luther said, "Yes, yes, I must own to them all. Have you any *more*?" The accuser of the brethren, being expert at the business, soon supplied him with a further length of charges, till there seemed to be no end to it. Martin waited till no more were forthcoming and then he cried, "Have you any more?" "Were not these enough?" Ay, that they were. "But," said Martin Luther, "write at the bottom of the whole account, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.'"

Brethren, this was a receipt in full, stamped in such a manner that even Satan could not question the correctness of it. However many or however few—all our sins are gone when the atoning blood comes in.

I have an ugly thing in my study. It is a piece of iron with a sharp point to it at the top, and the bottom is formed of a rounded piece of wood. It is not an ornamental object, especially as it holds

impaled upon it a fine selection of bills, which are inclined to go yellow and dusty. Bills are horrible things, but though I have a file of them, they never horrify me in the least, for though they are very many, and some of them are for large amounts, yet there is not one of them but what has Her Majesty's head in the corner, with the name of the creditor to whom I have paid it. I have no fear of these records either day or night. In fact, it is a comfort to keep them, now that they are discharged. When I look at the old bills, I think of my old sins, pierced through by my Lord and kept in my penitent memory as a witness to the value of His blood which has set me free from sin's tremendous debt.

Here is the receipt for them all—"The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." Some of you, I dare say, can look tonight at many a file of your transgressions. Are the bills all receipted? Are your sins all blotted out? Then you can bless the name of the Lord that the plague of your heart is gone. You are not afraid to live or afraid to die, for perfect pardon, irreversible pardon—pardon which makes a sweep of all transgression and sinks it as in a bottomless sea, from which it never can be washed up forever—pardon, perfect pardon is yours in Christ Jesus. How sweetly this now rings out. Is there any music of silver bell that can equal it? Pardon! Pardon!—

*"Earth has a joy unknown in heaven—
The new-born peace of sins forgiven!
Tears of such pure and deep delight,
Ye angels! never dimmed your sight."*

The freeness, fullness, perpetuity, and completeness of pardon is its greatest joy. Our Lord does nothing by halves, but plunges the whole of our guilt into the sea of His own blood, where it is drowned forever and being justified by faith, from now on we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. That is the first help we will mention and who shall say that it is not a grand one?

Did you notice in my text a little word which follows *pardon*—"and *do*." Now, when the Lord forgives a man's sins, He then begins to do for him many wonderful things. For instance, that hardness of the heart He melts down, that uneasiness He quiets, that tendency to sin He destroys by imparting a new tendency—a tendency to holiness. The Lord can make the old sinner to become a babe in grace, so that he shall be just as if he were born again—nay, he *shall* be born again.

An old man who had lived a vicious life, sat down in his cottage a sad remnant of humanity, a worn-out waster of life—and when his little grandchild came with curly locks and clambered up his knee, he patted his cheeks, and murmured to himself, "O God, if I could be a little child again and begin anew!"

That wish of many shall be fulfilled to all who look to Jesus. "Except you be converted and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." "You must be born again." The mercy is that you *may* be born again. New life shall enter old hearts, or old hearts shall be made new and filled with eternal life which forever has the dew of its youth. Turning your eye to the great sacrifice, altar, temple, Priest, even Jesus Christ, and crying to Him the prayer of faith, His Spirit will come upon you, and working miracles upon you, will make you a new creature in Christ Jesus. Old things shall pass away and all things shall become new.

After that the Lord will continue to do great things for you. He will keep you to the end—He will lead you from strength to strength and from joy to joy. He will make you useful and that is what you never dreamed you could be. The thorny waste shall bear fruit a hundred-fold. He will take you from among sinners and put you among saints. And putting you among the saints, He will make your very experience of sin to be instrumental for good. As none make better gamekeepers than old poachers when they are reclaimed, so none seem better able to bring others to Christ than those who know what sin and salvation mean by actual experience. Such persons talk of what they have felt in their own case and when they are saved, they speak of a salvation which is manifest to everybody—for they are such changed men and changed women that no one can deny the power of grace upon them.

How eagerly do I hope that my Lord Jesus will quarter on the enemy tonight. O Lord, come in and capture some out of this crowd. Say to many who throng this building, “Tonight I must abide in your house.” O my brother, lives no longer an indifferent life, but begin to care for your soul’s eternal interests. No longer oppose your Savior. Become one of His disciples. He has many such as you are and He does not despise them because they once rioted in sin. On the contrary, He binds them to Himself by the greatness of their former guilt. They love Him much because they have had much forgiven, and they serve Him all the more earnestly because of what He has done for them. The Lord grant that the like may happen in your case, for Jesus Christ’s sake—and He shall have all the glory. Amen and Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 116
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—531, 538, 556

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